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SHALL CHURCHES INCREASE THEIR EFFICIENCY BY SCIENTIFIC METHODS?

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This question can be answered more intelligently if we first note the trend of the scientific movement in recent times. Since Darwin the more modern form of the scientific method has been entering one field after another until nearly the entire range of human interest has come under its control. Biology, geology, physics, chemistry, history, law, ethics, psychology, education, theology, art, and social life have all been greatly changed and powerfully quickened by it. And just now its influence in the field of business is attracting wide attention.

In a way the scientific method has long influenced business through the common aim that science and business have always had. That aim may be said to be to get all there is in a given thing into relation to all that bears on that thing, with the utmost economy of time and effort in doing it. This is substantially true whatever the subject of it be, whether a pound of coal or a pint of milk. Probably, so far as this common aim goes, business and science are and have been in closer accord than science and any other human interest. But after we leave this point of agreement in aim the harmony between the methods of science and business has hitherto been much less complete. For one thing, the motive of the two differs. For, while the scientist works from the love of knowledge for its own sake, the man of business is controlled by the desire for personal gain and brings everything to the test of the profit-and-loss account. Another marked and significant difference up to very recent times is that the methods of business have been largely those of rule of thumb or mainly empirical, while those of science have consciously—to use Huxley's famous characterization of science—been those of "trained and organized common-sense." True, the business man has been a man of great common-sense, but

his common-sense has not been organized and trained to act in those ways that are recognized as scientific. But recently, under the lead of Mr. Frederick W. Taylor, the business man is having his common-sense organized and trained to work in ways similar to those of science. This is bringing him the consciousness that not only is science his benefactor in a host of ways but is also his co-worker in the best methods of both science and business, and therefore his best instructor in the very management of his business. Once having found its way into the basin of business method, the stream of science is bound in time to fill it so long as water runs down hill. Mr. Taylor has opened wide the sluiceways.

Some notice of the underlying reason for this extension of the modern scientific method from one department of human effort to another until it has reached the entire field is useful at this point. This reason is found in the doctrine of evolution as Darwin and others have developed it in the last half-century. The evolutionary theory has made the universe a unit in human thought as it never was before. In earlier times the world was believed to have been made by a master mechanic. On this theory the laws in one field might be the same as those in another or they might not. A little thing might or might not contain within itself the elements of the entire class to which it belonged. Consequently human thought dwelt in water-tight compartments far more generally than it is possible for it to do today. Progress in one science then had less effect on other sciences than it has now. The strict specialist was then a possibility as he cannot be today.

But under the conceptions of the evolutionary theory the universe has become a unity in a new, and it may be justly said, a vital way. Certain things have followed. In the first place, every science, every business is seen to be near of kin to every other. Science must of necessity touch all human activity. Nothing can escape its grasp. For a second thing, the evolutionary theory has given vastly greater significance to little things. Under it the ray of light, the atom, the cell, the bacillus, a mosquito, a drop of blood, the little brook, a single family, a village, a little corporation become freighted with significance. Each has its story to tell of the vast field to which it belongs. This suggests a third thing, and this is

the increasing importance that has been given to the most carefully extended analysis and estimation of the values of the elements analysis has thus found. And fourthly, the evolutionary theory has made necessary a large place for the use of the comparative method with its allied method of historical study. Perhaps the last is even the greatest contribution of the evolutionary period in science to the student. For like the microscope the comparative method multiplies the power of human vision. Under it the whole field sheds light on the various parts of it.

For these reasons and because of the urgent need, as will presently be shown, it would seem clear that, beyond the field of business into which the scientific method is now pressing, lies still another, which it must of necessity soon enter. I refer to that presented by the organization and work of churches, especially those of the more independent type, but in some degree all of them, at least all the Protestant churches. The scientific method has long been at work in biblical study and theology, stimulated and compelled anew by the influence of the evolutionary theory, as Professor Brown of the Union Theological Seminary of New York has lately pointed out.¹ But strange to say it has made little progress in the kindred study of church organization or, as it is called in technical terms, the field of ecclesiastical polity, or ecclesiology. But no one who reflects on the subject can fail to see that the same motives that have driven us to a large use of the scientific method in matters of religious thought will inevitably compel us to take it with us into the problems of practical religious work. In fact, this has already taken place to some extent in general religious work outside the local church organizations. The contention of this paper is that it must take place within the local churches themselves.

Now let us look at the need. For this purpose we will take an actual case that is typical of the general condition. With only slight verbal changes the following is taken from a report made fifteen or more years ago to a Congregational church in a more than usually intelligent community. The report said in part:

Let us look at the composition and constitution of this church. It has a pastor, a board of deacons, a clerk, a treasurer, three committees of its own,

¹ *The Harvard Theological Review*, January, 1911.

and two joint committees with the ecclesiastical society. Within the last few years it has had connected with it, including the choir and Sunday school, fifteen or more different organizations and societies that are so far related to the church that their meetings are held with it and their reports made to it at the annual church meeting. Now and then one of these societies has dropped out and a new one is formed to meet some demand. But most of them continue unto this day. There is also an ecclesiastical society, so called, which is the legal representative of the church.

When we look a little farther certain interesting facts appear. A very few of these bodies are in constitutional connection with the church. Others have a long-recognized and close, but wholly informal, connection with it, and some sustain chiefly or solely only practical relations to the church. Most are entirely self-regulating, while in spirit they are in complete harmony with the church. Some are organically connected with outside denominational or other societies from which they derive a great part of their constitution, rules, literature, and plans of work. All aim at the common good. All have done useful work, each in its own way, while some have proved of rare value. As a whole certainly the coming and growth of these institutions have been natural, so as to meet a succession of needs and opportunities. Probably most were introduced after some consultation with the pastor and a few other persons, but not often at the formal request of the church or even by its formal consent. Their working ideas, as well as their constitutions and rules, have come partly from within the church and partly from without it. Your committee cannot tell how many of the women of the church interest themselves in one or more of their societies for missionary work or how many are in none. Nor have we inquired how far the several committees and societies overlap each other's field, nor where they support each other best or possibly interfere with one another's work. At present there are no organizations for men only.

The church nominally elects the officers of the Sunday school. The other societies choose their own officers, but none of them except the Sunday school has either the honors or the obligations of a constitutional relation to the church itself. Nor is there any way under the formal rules of the church, aside from the customary annual meeting and the occasional annual sermon, by which the church and many of these agencies are brought into official or regular communication with each other and the church over their common interests and work. In short, there is no general business committee or executive board through which the church and many of these agencies can easily be kept in close touch with each other though the present church committee has developed little in that direction. Besides the inevitable inefficiency of this generally loose organization there must be a considerable waste of time by the pastor and others in getting the right persons together for various purposes.

Probably this account fairly represents the condition of the organization of the greater part of the churches of considerable

size in more than one denomination and to some extent the situation in most Christian bodies in the more progressive parts of the country. These churches are now made up of a heterogeneous collection of institutions—in manufacturing we should call them machines—that have come in from time to time to meet real or supposed needs, all running side by side without much regard to the relation each should sustain to the other or to the whole. Indeed, this situation is much like that which we should find in a factory if it had introduced its machinery in a similar way, run it all at the top of its speed or as the various operators felt disposed, with little regard for the precise amount and quality of work from each machine which the general objects of the factory required, and rarely throwing out a machine or adjusting it to the common need.

Look a moment in another direction. Until recently there has been no study of pedagogical values with respect to a common spiritual end in church aims. The application of the principles of religious pedagogy to the various activities of the local church, except recently in the Sunday school, has hardly begun. A system of examination and promotion from one grade to another in the Sunday school is comparatively recent and still far from being general. Congregations are almost invariably nothing more than passive listeners to addresses with no adequate provision for securing from the hearer study and practice of the instruction. The practice part of the work of the church is widely separated from the instruction. The midweek meeting invites either simple testimony to truth or experience or gives an opportunity to air all sorts of opinions, true or false, mature or crude, without that intelligent criticism of them which is essential to real growth.

Nobody tries to keep in touch, nobody can, with this variety of independent effort but the minister. There is no central board nor anything else that can act as a clearing-house for all these activities. The overworked minister is distracted with the effort he feels he must make to know something about all of them. He feels that he is made a "jack-at-all-trades." And yet men of affairs, accustomed to methodical systems by which they have the oversight of their own business easily arranged and carefully distributed, do not lift a finger to secure like efficiency in their own churches.

They may be studying the problem of efficiency in the larger work of their denomination with enthusiasm, but they have no eyes for the similar and even more urgent problem in their own local church. On the latter question the denominational newspaper is as silent as the grave until popular interest may seem to justify its treatment. Our social thinking is still provincial, individualistic, while science is telling us that social conditions are so allied that no one of them, to use an apostolic phrase, can live unto itself.

If we look at the situation with the comparative method we see still more clearly its weakness. The local church, especially that of the original New England type, which has extended far and wide over the country, is of the same sociological type as the town, the school, and the corporation, with only such differences as their peculiar objects necessitate. These institutions have all moved along a common line, but have been unlike in their rate of progress and in the time when they have passed from one stage to another. Let us look a moment at this movement comparatively.

The typical New England town was originally a simple solidarity. All its social affairs were the concern of all its citizens assembled in a town meeting. Then came a period of differentiation lasting about a hundred years. In this second stage—the period of differentiation—school districts were formed. The care of roads, the supply of water, lighting, protection against fire, and transportation became the especial care of corporations or associations that were either under the control of the town or were left to themselves for their management. This was the second stage in town development and the condition of things that came about under it developed what is known as the municipal problem, which aims to escape the evils of unregulated or ill adjusted control. And now for the last one or two generations the towns and cities have been entering the third stage of development in which the municipality has taken over the work of the old school and highway districts and brought many of the various public-service corporations under control.

The similar movement in the great business corporations is too well known to need more than the merest mention. Subsidiary organizations, such as express companies, organizations ostensibly for supplying facilities for doing the freight business of railroads or

to increase business in insurance companies but often seeking chiefly to advance the private interests of officials by turning into their own pockets profits that belonged to stockholders or to the public, marked the second stage in this class of institutions. But business has already far advanced in efforts at the reform of these evils by its entrance on the third stage, that of reintegration and more scientific adjustments. A science of business organization and management is rapidly developing.

Our system of public schools has passed through the first and second of these stages and is well into the third. For the old district school, or the mere collection of independent schools in one building where each teacher and each school was a law unto itself and each room did its own work, with little or no regard for what others were doing or for what they needed from the rest, has passed away in all the more advanced communities of the country. Schools are now brought together where possible. In many schools each teacher does her own part of the common work, teaching her own subject and carefully adjusting her work to that of the other rooms and teachers. Functional organization has to some extent taken the place of the old group form which held the entire ground in the past. Teachers teach subjects instead of being room teachers. Educational values too are carefully ascertained and made to shape the work of the teacher.

In short, we find that business, civic affairs, and education have all passed through the second into the third stage of social development and are now busy with the task of reorganization in social wholes, to increase their efficiency.

Now how is it with the average church of today? It is, as the facts already given show, in the second stage, confronting the need of entering the third but yet hardly conscious of the fact. Probably neither business nor civil affairs nor education ever carried the practice of individualism in work and organization to the extreme which has been reached in many churches. Nowhere else probably have the waste and inefficiency resulting from this chaotic condition become so great as it is in the field of religion, unless possibly, as some maintain, it be in the field of philanthropy. The young in our churches are exposed to a variety of societies having no intelli-

gent adjustment of their work to each other, or what is quite as important, to the home from which they come. The home may be working along the line of Christian nurture but the Sunday-school teacher or the leader in the society of the young people may unconsciously upset all the work of the home by insistence on instantaneous conversion. Instruction may be the work of one institution and training to service may be done in another, the one professing to be the laboratory of the other, but the subjects of the two may be so far apart in time and character as to secure small results so far as this common end goes. It is easy to see that at present the church is far behind the times in ordinary organization and seriously lacking in efficiency.

There is another evil inherent in this state of things. For the present condition lends itself too easily to the great moral and social evil of exploitation and those practices which, in other circles, we call graft. Outside organizations, especially if they have taken on the essential form of trusts, as is sometimes the case, can foist on churches their schemes by simply enlisting the sympathy of the pastor or some person or persons of influence. Sometimes the practical control of the religious instruction of the church is in the hands of some enterprising publishing company that is itself under no control from the church except through a general public opinion. These outside agencies can and do sometimes create a state of things that dominate the whole situation and make progress slow and difficult. All this may bring about better results in some directions apparently than could be had if the church were let alone. It is a common complaint that members of churches having numerous organizations do less work of their own initiative than formerly and individual members are inclined to idleness except as some society lays out the work for them and sees that they do it.

Certainly, as the result of this survey of the situation, there is a field for the efficiency engineer in the church if anywhere. Much, it should be said, has been done to secure better organization of the Sunday school and better work by the teacher and pupil in it. The same is true of the societies for the young people and of some of the other societies within the churches. But the point is that these efforts have not been made with careful and full consideration

of the needs of the entire church organization as a whole and of the part each society has in reference to all the others. The special problem is only slightly made a part of the entire problem. Our churches of the larger type are like a factory with a lot of machines that are fairly well made for their own specific purpose but with little thought of their exact value as parts of a whole. The teamwork of a baseball nine or of a football game ought to bring shame to the face of the intelligent church member when he compares it with the crude co-operation of his church societies.

One fundamental difficulty is that we have not yet learned to grapple with a social problem in full recognition of the fact that because it is a social problem and not an individualistic one we must take hold of it with the methods of social rather than those of individualistic study. We are pottering away at some part of our task in ignorance of the great first need of successful effort in social reform, which is to get our particular subject into relation to the whole of which it is a part and then to go about our work with the methods of treatment that a science of the whole demands instead of striking at it as an isolated problem. Social problems, we cannot too often remind ourselves, must be treated by social methods and not by those of individualism. The architect cannot solve his problems with the tools of the carpenter or those of the mason. A problem in society is a problem of society, both in its origin and in its present form. It is, therefore, imperative that it be studied in its relations to other social problems and be treated historically, comparatively, and relatively as well as analytically. The feeble results that often follow our attempts at social reform and social studies are largely due to our imperfect grasp of the methods of social as distinguished from those of individualistic science, if there be any such thing as an individualistic science. The truth is that the problems of business, of school, of the municipality, and of the corporation are not in a field outside that of the church. Or to put it the other way, the church is in the same field with these other social institutions and therefore has within it all the essentials of their problems. It is a sad thing for the church and for society if the church fails to see this and to act accordingly. Here is a fundamental reason why the church should increase its efficiency by scientific

methods—it loses its touch with society and its power over society if its spiritual power is not expressed in the thought and language of society itself as these appear in social laws and methods of work. If the church would have society listen to its message it must itself hear the message which society has for its own ear.

Two objections will most likely be made to the use of scientific methods by the churches. One is that churches have no such control over their members as that which the school has over its pupils and business has over its employees. The school has compulsory attendance. The shop uses the power of the wage to secure its objects. The church has neither of these compulsions. The voluntary principle rules. The Sunday school meets this difficulty in contrast with the public school. The other objection is that the church is dealing with spiritual things and we cannot do in its field what we can in the material world. Now the answer to these two objections is essentially the same.

For one thing we may say that the spiritual world and the material world both came from the hand of the same Creator and that we are coming to see more clearly that the law of the spiritual world is not so unlike that of the natural, so called, as we once thought. And the other thing is that we are to remember to apply here, as we have to do elsewhere, what may be called the scientific rule of *mutatis mutandis*, which always comes into our method when we pass from one department of science to another. That is to say, we have simply to make the changes in the details of method which are required in passing from one of the fields in which we work to another. The laws of the spiritual kingdom may be less evident than those of the material but not for that reason less real. The task of the ecclesiastical engineer may not be so easy as that of the efficiency engineer in directing the laying of brick but he has it on his hands nevertheless, and if this is true he can and must perform it.

We shall make a gain if we observe these principles in moral issues. For it is in its spiritual forces that the strength of the scientific method lies when applied to the problems of the church. In its use the individual will be emancipated from slavery to the material and individualistic and will enter into the freedom of hearty response to the calls of the social order as a whole, in which insti-

tutions will be the mediating influence between the individual and society. What socialism on the one hand and individualism on the other are striving to attain will be gained through the wholesome vigor of the organizations that mediate between the individual and the social whole.

Almost our least concern should be over the beginning of practical work. The more complete the preliminary scientific study the more successful will be the practical results in the long run. Study and experiment will have to go hand in hand even then. The time is ripe for the movement. When once the idea is fairly lodged in the minds of the more thoughtful people it will quickly take root. The idea of a careful adjustment of functional to group, or what is called in business "gang" organization and in school affairs "class" organization, will come up from the first. What correspond to time or motion studies in business may or may not have a considerable place in working out the engineering problems of the church. But the proper studies will come somewhere. Somewhere, too, here a single church and there another will perhaps throw its entire organization into the crucible in the hope of bringing it out in a new form. Others will make over their organizations step by step. Mistakes of course will be made. Empirical methods will be mistaken for science and even crude rule-of-thumb procedure will hold the field in many places. But it is not hard to see that the present need, the demand of business men who feel keenly the lack of efficiency in the present chaotic character of church organization, and the sweep of the modern scientific movement as a whole will in time change the entire situation. For the situation, discouraging as it appears to be from one point of view, is in reality one of the greatest promise. The immediately urgent question for us is, Will the churches see their opportunity and seize it?